The story of my childhood, written for my children

The Story Of My Childhood Written For My Children ALICE MENDENHALL GEORGE Photographs by Minnie Mendenhall LC Whittier, California 1923

DEDICATED to My Father and Mother who, with their courage and industry, helped to carve out of the broad prairies and heavy timber, the great State of Minnesota, and to My Grandchildren George Ernest Haig and Barbara Alice George who, living in this wonderful twentieth century, will never know the privations nor the joy of pioneering.

FOREWORD

Having wished many times that my grandparents and my parents had written an account of the early days in Ohio and Indiana, and thinking that my descendants might like to know something of the early days in Minnesota—the days long past, never to return, I have decided to write for them the story of my childhood.

In those days nearly all the settlers drove ox teams, cut the hay and grain with scythe or cradle, did the sewing by hand, and had for their light the tallow candle.

The open prairies were covered with wild flowers and wild strawberries, the grand old forest trees still grew where God had planted them, and the Indian roamed over land he called his own.

Grandfather Kenworthy in His Forty-Eighth Year

MY ANCESTORS

“We are all nobly born; fortunate those who know it, and blessed those who remember.”

“The threads of our pedigree are many and tangled.”— *Robert Louis Stevenson.*

The Mendenhalls came from England, were all Quakers, and received their grants of land in Pennsylvania from William Penn.

In 1715, Aaron Mendenhall, my ancestor, married Rose Pierson, the daughter of Thomas Pierson, the surveyor, and personal friend, of William Penn. The sister of Rose was he mother of Benjamin West, the Quaker artist.

In 1791, Caleb Mendenhall married Susanna Gardner of Nantucket Island. Tradition says she was part Indian. The chest she used for her wedding outfit was one of the boxes in which our goods came to Minnesota. Mother kept bedding in it for years, and we always called it the Big Chest.

In 1820, William Mendenhall married Elizabeth Warner. They were my grandparents.

The Warners, also Quakers, owned the land where the Philadelphia Navy Yard now stands. It was leased for ninety-nine years, and the family has never been able to regain it.

Grandmother was left a widow at the age of forty-one, with eleven children. She was stout and comfortable, wa called Aunt Betsey and loved by all who knew her.

Grandfather Kenworthy, my mother's father, was a tall, very erect, rather thin man with keen gray eyes and heavy hair. He was an aristocrat of English and Welsh mixture, with an autocratic temperament, which at times became tyrannical. “A man severe he was and

stern to view.” His wife and daughters were afraid of him, and the grandchildren “quick to trace the day's disaster in his morning face.” He was a Deist, but not a Christian; and

“In arguing too, the parson owned his skill, For e'en though vanquished, he could argue still.”

He was the most versatile person I ever knew. He built his own flour mills, could make shoes and barrels, and made musical instruments and played them. He made a perpetual motion machine once, and I remember how bitterly disappointed he was because it wouldn't work. He also wrote poetry. He used to tell us of a load of flour ground by himself in a mill he built, which he took on a flatboat of his own construction down the Mississippi River of New Orleans. He was gone three months, and the mail service was so poor that the family didn't hear from him in all that time.

Time proved that he had no vision of the future, however. He passed through Chicago in 1854, thinking it would never be much of a town, came on to St. Paul, decided against St. Anthony Falls, one of the best water powers in the country, and 15 through he could have bought for a song the whole of Nicollet Island, which is now worth millions of dollars, he went on up the Minnesota River and built two mills on Le Sueur Creek, which was dry within a few years.

In 1827, he married Miriam Mote. Though they were both birth-right Quakers, he refused to say his own marriage ceremony. Of course she couldn't if he wouldn't, so they were “dealt with” and asked to say they were sorry. As they were not sorry, to use his own expression, “The meeting greased a board and slid them out.” They never joined another church.

There were some rather noted artists in the Mote family, but Grandmother was not one of them. She was a placid, bent, washed-out woman, with very thin hair and mild blue eyes which had a far-away look in them at times. She enjoyed poor health more than anyone I ever knew, and took hundreds of bottle of patent medicines, each kind warranted

to cure her particular symptoms. She was generous to a fault and would do anything for her grand-children. We cut the crusts off both ends of her newly-baked loaves of bread, saturated them with butter, and put on brown sugar as thick as the bread. She often had some little dainty for us, a few raisins, a piece of maple sugar, or a dried peach. She was superstitious, as so many were in those days, and happened on Hallowe'en and at other times when she was a girl. When asked how many brothers and sisters she had, she would say, “Well, here were six of one and 16 seven of the other, I forget which.” Then she would proceed to name them.

A book in which were locks of her friends' hair was a curiosity. Some of the hair was accompanied by such verses as this: “This lock of hair I once did wear, But now I trust it to your care. If we no more each other see, Look on this and think of me.”

She could knit without looking at her work, and it seemed to me she was always knitting gray wool socks for Grandfather. Those socks were ribbed or seamed for the whole length of the leg, and had white heels and toes, and some white around the top. Of course she must have knit for herself too, but I remember only the socks.

They had five daughters, of whom my mother was the oldest. Every one of the five was good looking, smart, and capable in every way. They wanted to go to school, but Grandfather said he knew enough for the whole family, and, any way, girls didn't need an education.

My father, Hiram Warner Mendenhall, was a heavy-set, bald-headed man, with a full beard and the kindest dark-blue eyes. He was a friend to everybody, rejoicing if they were happy and sorry if they were in trouble. He liked to play games, enjoyed a good story, was always kind, and would give away his last dollar if he thought someone needed it more than he did.

He was a birth-right Quaker, but “married out of meeting” and consequently was dropped from the roll. It was a number of years before he joined another church, but “he added

to his faith, virtue, 17 and to virtue, temperance, and to temperance, patience, and to patience, brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity," thus living more according to Christ's teaching than many church members.

He married Nancy Ann Kenworthy in 1847. Neither of them was twenty years old; and I often heard him say that he had to borrow the money to pay the preacher.

Mother, a tiny woman, never weighed over ninety pounds, but she was full of courage and energy, a true pioneer. Like her father, she could use her hands for whatever she wished to do. She was good looking, artistic, and musical, and liked to read when she thought she had time. There was not the least bit of humor in her make-up, and she never forgot to wind the clock or put out the cat. She cared nothing for games and could not understand why any one wanted or needed a vacation; but "The heart of her husband could safely trust in her. She sought wool and flax and worked willingly with her hands. She arose while it was yet night and gave meat to her household. Her candle went not out by night. She laid her hands to the spindle and her hands held the distaff. She looked well to the ways of her household and she ate not the bread of idleness."

Such were my ancestors.

"The sights and sounds of my youth pursue me; I see like a vision the youth of my father and of his father and of the whole stream of lives flowing down with the sound of laughter and tears." — *Robert Louis Stevenson.*

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WE MOVE TO MINNESOTA

In the spring of 1854, Grandfather Kenworthy went from Indiana, where we were living, to Minnesota, which was still a territory, with the intention of buying land if he liked the country.

Minnesota is beautiful in the spring, and he was so well pleased that he bought 160 acres in Le Sueur County, and hired an old Frenchman to break some sod and plant some corn, potatoes and turnips. He came home with such glowing accounts that Father and Mother decided to move, and began at once to get ready.

They made the picking boxes, some of them of black walnut boards from trees which grew on the “Gravelly Run” farm of Grandmother Mendenhall.

Everything was ready by the latter part of July. We, my father and mother, sister Clara, aged five years, brother Orson, three, and I, three and one-half months old, Grandfather, Uncle Caleb and Aunt Mal Mendenhall, and a man by the name of John Blue, took the train at Thorntown, Indiana, for Chicago, where we changed cars for Rock Island, a town in Illinois on the Mississippi river.

There we took a boat, the War Eagle, for St. 19 Paul. We stayed all night in St. Paul and the next day took a smaller boat to go up the Minnesota river. At the rapids where Chaska is now, the river was so low that the boat could go no farther; so Father got a man to take us the rest of the way with his team.

We stayed all night at a tavern run by a Mr. Post. Sometime during the night a man was murdered in the house, but we knew nothing of it until morning.

When we reached Traverse des Sioux, an Indian trading post, we saw Indians for the first time. We stayed in Traverse while the men built a house on the farm, which was located a mile east of the village of Ottawa, partly in the timber and partly on Le Sueur Prairie, one of the many small prairies in the “Big Woods.”

The “Big Woods” was a forest of hardwood timber beginning somewhere in the northern part of Iowa and stretching far to the north, way beyond St. Paul.

The house was of unhewn logs. The shingles had to be made by hand, but there was a sawmill somewhere near where they got rough boards for the floor, roof boards and casings.

When the walls were up, half the roof on, and a hole cut for the door, we moved in. We children all had the whooping cough at that time.

The corn and potatoes were now ready to use. Father punched a piece of tin full of holes, nailed it to a board, and on this grated corn meal. He did this at night after his day's work was done.

In Minnesota the nights are pretty cool after the middle of August, and, as our goods didn't come 20 until nearly the middle of October, we were short of bedding. Father bought some blankets at the trading post and got some ticking somewhere, Grandfather bought some feather from the Indians, and Mother made father beds. We had slept on them just one night when our goods came. I don't know whether we would ever have had them if Grandfather hadn't gone to St. Paul to investigate. He found them in a warehouse under hundreds of boxes and barrels belonging to the great number of settlers who were flocking into the territory. He asked the men to get them for him and they refused. He finally had to pay them quite a sum of money. Soon after that he went back to Indiana.

Father worked in the woods all winter getting out rails with which to fence the farm. Those worm fences took many rails, for they were laid up six or seven rails high, and then staked and ridered.

Many people suffered for food during their first winter in Minnesota. Some lived on turnips for two or three weeks, others had nothing but corn bread for a time, and many could get no salt. I think we must have had plenty, as I never heard anything to the contrary.

THE OLD LOG HOUSE

The house stood on a knoll facing the west, with cottonwood trees around it which Father planted the first year we were there. North of the house was a wild plum thicket, on the southeast a garden, on the south a spring surrounded with willows, and at the foot of the slope on the southwest stood the barn. A road ran from the barn through the pasture to the “Big Road,” which connected Ottawa with the backwoods settlements.

The house was sixteen by twenty-four feet, with two rooms and a loft. Afterward, a “lean-to” was built on at the back for a pantry and kitchen, from which we went down cellar. The cellar door—a trap—was directly in front of the door leading from the front room to the kitchen. That door was supposed to be locked before anyone went down cellar. Sometimes it was forgotten; then if anyone chanced to open it, he had a fall.

There was no brick in the country at that time. The few chimneys for the fireplaces were made of sticks and clay, and were called “stick and clay” chimneys. Some people ran their stovepipes through the windows, but ours went through the roof. One of my earliest recollections is of the 24 roof's catching fire one very cold morning from an overheated stove.

In the northeast corner of the front room stood the four-poster bed with curtains around it, the blue and white double coverlet—we always called in the “big coverlid”—used for a spread for every day and the lily quilt put on for dress-up occasions. (Mother spun and colored the yarn for the coverlet before she was married, and a cousin of hers wove it. I now have half of it at the door at the back of the front hall; the other half was stolen by a Mexican in California. The lily quilt mother pieced and quilted before I was born. I am using it for a spread on my bed today.) The trundle bed stood under the big bed during the day and was pulled out at night for the children to sleep in. A mirror with a picture at the top hung between the big bed and the door going into the kitchen. I don't remember the rest of the furniture, except a big bureau, and I don't know where it stood.

About the first of May Grandfather and Grandmother Kenworthy, Mother's three sisters, Aunt Ellen and Aunt Lib with their husbands, and Aunt Mary, a girl of about fourteen, Father's sister, Aunt Miriam Cadwallader, with Uncle Seth and their boy, Aldes, came from Indiana and were all at our house for a while. The Cadwalladers settled in Ottawa, the Barnharts built a house near ours, the Knoxes went back to Indiana, and Grandfather, Grandmother and Aunt Mary lived with us while Grandfather built a house and a mill on Le Sueur Creek, six miles north of the farm.

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SOME INDIAN STORIES

We often saw Indians with their ponies and drags going along the “Big Road.” One day I saw a lot of them and, calling Orson, I pointed my finger and said, “Look, look at the Indians.”

He said, “Don't you know any better than to point your finger at the Indians? They will shoot you.”

I, to be contrary, put my hand behind me and pointed, then said, “There, I did point my finger at them and they didn't shoot me either.”

The Indians often came to the house and were very friendly at that time. One morning, the first winter we were there, after Father had gone to work and before Mother had cleared the table, two big Indians came in. They ate everything in sight, even some raw potatoes; then they cleaned their guns, and one of them raised his to look through the barrel, of course pointing it toward the window. As I was sitting in the trundle bed just under the window, Clara and Orson, fearing that he was going to shoot me, began to scream. He thought that was such a good joke that he did it again. Mother made him stop and ordered them out of the house. She was a “heap tonka squaw.” Tonka means big or brave.

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Another time, when I was about a year old, two squaws came to the house. One of them, who had a papoose about my age, said, “White papoose, pretty papoose, me trade papoose.” Clara was so frightened that she grabbed me up and ran to the garden where father was at work.

An old squaw and her two grown daughters came into the kitchen one cold morning and crowded around the stove. Mother, in taking down a flat iron, which hung on a nail behind the stove, dropped it, and hit the old squaw on the head. When she cried, Mother rubbed the place with camphor, and told her she was sorry. The girls laughed and thought it a fine joke that their mother was hurt.

One day a big Indian came in and demanded something to eat. Mother told him she had nothing for him. He said, “White woman lie.”

She picked up the broom and started toward him, exclaiming, “You can't talk that way to me.”

He went out on the porch where he had left his gun and she ran to lock the door, thinking he meant to shoot her. Before she reached the door, he stuck his head in and with a broad grin said, “Good-bye.”

A young chief came to the house and asked for warm water and soap, to wash paint from his face. When he was clean, Mother said, “Now you look fine. Why don't you leave the paint off?” He laughed and asked for a mirror. After putting on fresh paint, he said, “Me big Injun, me go see squaw.”

The first things the Indians learned from the white people were to swear and to drink whisky. A 27 brave asked Grandfather for “fire water”—whisky. When told that there wasn't any, he pointed to a bottle of camphor, and said, “White man lie.” He snatched the bottle

and took a big drink. When he could get his breath he began to swear, and Grandfather said he had never heard such oaths in his life.

Grandmother had a fine fly-brush made of pea cock feathers. An Indian saw it and offered a cosh poppy—ten cents—for one feather. When Aunt Mary handed him the feather, he snatched the coin from the table where he had laid it and ran away with both, laughing.

Nepo, in Indian, means to kill, and pochachee means to get out or go away.

Minnesota is the “Land of the sky blue water,” with ten thousand lakes within her borders, which are large enough to be surveyed and named. Around them grow many sugar maple trees; the water is full of fish; on the margins wild rice is abundant; in the rushes on the banks wild ducks, geese and other fowl build their nests, and beaver and other fur-bearing animals, and deer and other game are plentiful. This was a paradise for the Indians, and as they couldn't agree to share these bounties, they fought for the possession of them.

After a battle, the Sioux would have a scalp dance at Traverse des Sioux. These dances were held in the evening around a big fire, and the white people went with their children to look on. When I was about four we went to one, and I can yet see flicker of the firelight and the squaws with their long hair hanging down their backs, throwing themselves upon their faces with grief 28 for friends killed. Their cries were louder if the dead warriors had been scalped, for that meant that they could not go to the Happy Hunting Ground. The warriors, in paint and breech cloths, stood close together in a big circle around the fire, jumping up and down to the noise of the tomtom, yelling, yip, yip, yip, yip, and at the same time dancing around the fire. Some of them had taken scalps, which they carried fastened to long poles. The white people, in their eagerness to see, crowded us very close to the Indians, and a scalp swung out and hit Mother in the face. I don't think we ever went again.

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SOME OTHER STORIES

When I was five, Brother Willie was born and Mother was sick for three months afterward. Orson and I stayed with Grandmother much of the time. We used to find bits of mica along the race bank, and I thought that was what glass was made of.

One day a peddler came to the house. Of course, I was on hand to see what he had in his pack. He made big eyes at me and asked me if I knew what made his stomach so big; then he said it was because he ate little girls just like me. I ran into the house and wouldn't come out again while he was there. For years afterward, I was afraid of peddlers.

While Mother was sick, Sarah Plowman, the daughter of a neighbor, worked for her. She was always talking to Sister Minnie, who was in her third year, about her little sister, Nell. One day while she was washing, she missed the soft soap. She found Minnie behind the house with it; when Minnie saw Sarah, she said, “Sarah Men'en'all, your soap ain't good, so it tain't; you can just take it out home to Nell, and let she pitch into it.”

The wolves gave trouble one winter and Father set a trap for them. One morning he found a wolf 30 caught by one foot and apparently frozen stiff. He put in the cellar to thaw out, so that he could skin it. When he went down cellar the next morning, he found the wolf very much alive, sitting up in the corner ready to fight.

One day when we children were playing in the pasture, I called the others to come quick and see the funny crooked stick. They came and jeeringly said, “Don't you know a snake when you see it?”

Wild grapes grew in great abundance along the river; in the fall after the frost had sweetened them the whole family would go in the wagon and gather bushels of them to be made into jelly and sweet pickles. These, with jam made from the wild plums, furnished the only sauce we had during the first new years in Minnesota, except the pumpkin which mother dried every fall, for pies.

Father bought a reaper in 1856, the first one on the Le Sueur prairie. Before that the hay and grain were cut by hand.

As there was almost never any church to go to, Sunday was visiting day. Everybody living within ten or twelve miles—if we liked him—was a neighbor, and we visited back and forth frequently. There were no buggies and not even spring seats for the wagons. The children sat in the bottom of the wagon or sled box, and the grown people rode on chairs or on boards laid across the box.

I don't remember many of the dresses I had when I was a child, but I do remember one. It was white with little pink rosebuds scattered over it. I was always coaxing mother to let me wear it.

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WE GO TO SCHOOL

When I was six I started to school in Ottawa. The teacher, Judson Jones, called Jud by everybody, was a character. In appearance he was not unlike Ichabod Crane, and as a talker, he was like Tennyson's brook—he went on forever.

In 1879, he wrote a spelling book called the “Alphabet of Orthoepy.” I have one of the books. Here is a quotation from among the examples given, showing how to use it: “Livz thâr a man with sol so ded, Hö never tu himself hath sed, This is mi on, mi nativ land?”

After I was married and living in Blue Earth City, he came there to give a reading. His hand bills read: “Go to the Methodist Church tonight to hear Enoch Arden, written as only Tennyson could write it, and read as only Judson Jones can read it.”

Two French boys named Robert (Robar) went to school. They could talk Indian and used to frighten the little children by telling them the Chippewas were coming. We were afraid to start home for fear we would be scalped on the way.

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A FEW OF THE PEOPLE WE KNEW

On the way to Ottawa, about a quarter of a mile down the “Big Road,” in a small log house across the road from the gravel pit, lived a family by the name of Gadwa. The children were mean and we were afraid of them. There were Abe, Ol, Mag, Mose, Tom, and others whose names I have forgotten. Clara and Orson were sent to Ottawa one day for some sugar and told to hurry back. When they came, long after they should, they had a little sugar in a torn sack, and their clothes were torn and dirty—the Gadwa children had fought them, taken the sugar over into the gravel pit, and eaten all they wanted.

Aunt Miriam Cadwallader, whom we often visited, was a dear Quaker lady who used the plain language. She had curvature of the spine and walked with one hand on her knee.

Then there was Lewis Smith, a large man with one leg much shorter than the other, a carpenter by trade and a friend of the children. He had a funny wheezy laugh.

Others were the Tom Raneys and the Reuben Lewises, both big families and friends of ours; Mr. Gazell, whose house was always burning down; 33 John Smith, called Gassy, because he talked so much; and Charley Pinney, whose dog bit Minnie.

In the backwoods lived two queer old men. One, of them used to say, “If I had a little more larnin' and they put me in President, I'd give ‘em hell on the tariff.” The other one would lament, “What a power I've lost by not raisin' sheep, and what a power I've lost by plantin' my taters too deep.”

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WE LEAVE THE FARM

In 1861 Grandfather sold the old mill and built a new one a half mile farther down the creek, and two miles east of the village of Le Sueur. Both of these mills had big overshot wheels.

As Father was to be a partner in the new mill, we left the farm the spring of that year and lived in the “Cogswell house”, across the creek from Grandfather's house and the mill.

We were now in the edge of the “Big Woods,” and it was beautiful. Here grew two or three kinds of oak trees, basswood, ironwood, hickory, elm, soft and hard, or sugar, maple, and ash.

The creek was very winding. The banks were rather steep and high in some places and in others low, with sand bars which were covered with little shells, cornelians, and other pretty stones. Here was the fish trap and there the swimming hole where we burned our backs every summer. On the banks grew wild grapes, wild plums, red and black haws, thorn-apples, pin- and choke-cherries, service berries, wild gooseberries and wild raspberries. We had grape-vine swings and many pretty places in which to build play houses. We sometimes found fox—phosphorescent—wood. 35 Then we would hold pieces in our mouths, and a piece at each eye, and play ghost.

The “Cogswell house” was just a shell, with cracks around the doors and windows. It would not have been warm enough to live in during the winter, if it hadn't been banked with dirt and leaves to the bottom of the windows. When the mercury went down to zero or below, we were cold in spite of our warm clothing, heavy shoes, and home-knit wool stockings. That winter we children all had the measles. Willie took cold, had pneumonia, and came near dying.

I remember the Christmas of that year more vividly than any other of my childhood. Minnie and I each had a pink calico apron, a stick of striped candy, an apple, and doll about seven inches long, with china head, hands, and feet. That was the first and only one I ever had.

Minnie and I went frequently to visit Mamie Drake. We liked herr and were very fond of her mother. To go there we crossed a little prairie, climbed a worm fence, and then went through Mr. Drake's pasture and barnyard. We always had to start home exactly at four o'clock and Mamie went to the fence with us.

One day, while crossing the pasture, I saw a large dark object on the ground by the creek. I asked what it was. Mamie said, with the loftiest tone, “That is the carcass of a critter.” I had never heard either of those words before, and didn't know that she meant a dead cow.

Between our house and Mr. Drake's fence were patches of hazel bushes, where we gathered large 36 quantities of nuts every fall. On a little higher ground junipers grew and whippoorwills built their nests. When we were picking windflowers there one day in the spring, Minnie stepped on a nest and broke all the eggs. We cried and the poor birds were distracted.

In the early summer of 1862 Father and Mother went to Indiana for a visit, taking Willie with them. Orson and Minnie stayed with Grandmother, and Clara and I were in Le Sueur with Mother's sister, Aunt Mary Swan, at least a part of the time.

On the Fourth of July we went to a picnic. When I started home, walking in the street as there were no sidewalks, I was facing the wind, which was blowing a gale and carrying back sounds of vehicles approaching from behind me. Uncle Jim Swan came up the street in his buggy, with his hat pulled down over his eyes to keep the dust out. The horse knocked me down and the buggy ran over me. Uncle Jim, as badly frightened as I was, picked me up and took me to Dr. Mayo, who was his next door neighbor. Fortunately no bones were broken.

Dr. Mayo was the father of the world-renowned surgeons, Dr. Will and Dr. Charley Mayo. Will, the older of the two, was a year old at that time. I used to play with their sister Trudie.

Father and Mother came home the next morning, on the boat that reached Le Sueur about five o'clock, and we were all glad to be at home and together again.

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Father and Mother, 1862.

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THE SIOUX MASSACRE

On Monday, August eighteenth, 1862, when Father came to dinner, he told us it was rumored that the Sioux Indians were on the warpath.

At two o'clock he came back from the mill, said the report was true, changed his clothes, took his shotgun and went to Le Sueur, where he joined a company of volunteers afterward known as the Le Sueur Tigers. Dr. Mayo and Uncle Jim Swan were also in the company.

They went to New Ulm, a town about forty miles up the Minnesota river, where they were joined by volunteers from Mankato and St. Peter, in all about three hundred and fifty white men.

The Indians had been killing people and burning houses at Yellow Medicine, Birch Coulee and in the surrounding country, but had not yet attacked New Ulm.

As soon as the defenders reached the town, they began building barricades of wagons, farm machinery and waste lumber. Many of the men who lived in the town were cowardly, and were hiding in cellars, with the women and children. Dr. Mayo drove them out, armed them with pitchforks, and told them to stand behind the barricades. When they asked what they should do if the Indians 40 came, Dr. Mayo swore and said, “Run your pitchforks through them.”

Father, seeing a man with a rifle who wouldn't fight, said, “Well, trade guns with me then, and after the battle we will trade back.” He never saw the man again and brought the rifle home with him.

At dawn on Tuesday, the nineteenth, all was quiet. Father said they would not have known there was an Indian within a hundred miles of them. Suddenly five or six hundred rose out of the slough where they had been hiding with grass bound to their heads, and with their blood-curdling was whoop rushed upon the town.

Father and twelve or fifteen other men fought their way to the windmill, which they held during the day, their shots telling fearfully upon the savages, forcing them to retire. Their ammunition running short, it fell to Father's lot to go for more. The other men told him afterward that twelve Indians shot at him as he ran around the corner of a log blacksmith shop. After dark they burned the windmill and escaped to the barricade.

A brave fight was also carried on from the brick postoffice and other points.

That night they began to burn houses to keep the Indians out of the town. On the nineteenth of August there were over two hundred buildings in the village, and on the twenty-fourth there were not over twenty-five.

The Indians made attack after attack during the week but were repulsed. On Sunday they withdrew, and on Monday the defenders also left the place, not daring to stay longer. All women, children, 41 and wounded men were put into wagons, one hundred fifty-three loads in all, and, with a goodly number of men on foot, moved toward St. Peter, twenty-five miles down the river, arriving without mishap.

The defenders' loss was ten killed and fifty wounded; the Indian loss is not known, but it must have been very heavy.

Had New Ulm fallen on the nineteenth, or had the Indians known their strength, all the settlers in Minnesota Valley would have been massacred or driven from the state. The week before the outbreak, Little Crow, the blood-thirsty chief of the Sioux, had spies at all the towns along the river, intending to make simultaneous attacks; fortunately, just at that very time a boatload of soldiers left Fort Snelling at the mouth of the Minnesota river for Fort Ridgeley, a short distance above New Ulm. The boat stopped at every town and the cannon was fired. The spies were frightened and told Little Crow they could not make the attack, as there were too many white men and too many big guns.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth of August, thirty thousand people fled on foot, on horseback, or with oxen, from the tomahawk and scalping knife, hiding in sloughs, in cornfields and under fallen logs during the day, and traveling stealthily by night. Many of them escaped; but some perished for want of food and water, and others were overtaken by the Indians and either killed or made prisoners. Two thousand were killed before they had time to escape. The grain, some uncut and some in stacks, was burned, as were also the 42 houses. The cattle, sheep, horses, and hogs were driven away.

After leaving New Ulm, the Indians began a retreat, murdering and burning as they went. They were pursued by U. S. soldiers, who rescued three hundred white persons and captured fifteen hundred Indians. Little Crow escaped. Three hundred twenty-one warriors were charged with murder; three hundred three were condemned to be hanged and the others to be imprisoned.

People living in the East, far removed from the scene of those butcheries, importuned President Lincoln to save the savages. After much controversy and petitioning, President Lincoln ordered forty to be put to death. One died, one was imprisoned, but thirty-eight were hanged at Mankato, December twenty-sixth, 1863.

During 1863 and 1864, most of the Sioux were transferred to their new reservation in the Black Hills, thus removing all dangers of another uprising in Minnesota.

There were a number of causes for this terrible slaughter, but I can mention only a few of them.

The Government had taken the land from the Indians, promising them an annuity. Sometimes the money was not paid for months after it was due, and sometimes the agents put part of it into their pockets. Possibly even with these and other grievances they would not have gone on the warpath if the conditions had been normal; but many men were in the South fighting for the Union, and the Indians felt that the time was ripe for driving the white people away and regaining their land. In the uprising they were led by Little Crow, who 43 hated the white people and was determined not to be friendly with them. His orders were, “Kill or drive out of the state every white person.”

Now to go back to the eighteenth of August.

After Father started for Le Sueur, Mother made everything as secure as possible and took us to Grandfather's for the night. The next afternoon we went up to Mr. Drake's, whose house on the prairie, built of logs, was safer in case of an attack. We found there many people who had come from the woods, bringing their bedding with them. The men and boys slept downstairs, completely covering the floor. The women and girls were upstairs, the women occupying the beds, and the children sleeping on the floor. I will never forget that night. The lights from the burning buildings in New Ulm reflected from the clouds, the dogs howled, and the little children cried. For years afterwards, when I heard a dog howl, I thought of the Indians and the burning of New Ulm.

The next day we went to Le Sueur and stayed at Henry Swan's until Father came home. Grandfather stayed at home to look after the horses, cows, and chickens.

One night Mrs. Swan heard a noise that sounded as though someone were trying to open a window. The women all got up and went down stairs, Grandmother leading with a lighted candle. They went to the kitchen, and after arming themselves with sticks of kindling

wood, which Orson had split and left by the stove, went all over the house and even down cellar, but found nothing wrong. The next morning they discovered that a dog had 44 been scratching himself on the corner of a trunk which was standing on the porch.

One Le Sueur man, who had gone to New Ulm to fight Indians, deserted, and came home with the report that the rest of the men had all been killed. When the people learned the truth, they threatened him with violence, and one woman carried a revolver for a time, to shoot him, she said, if she saw him. Another man loaded his household goods on two wagons, leaving just enough room for his own family. The women threw his furniture on the ground and told him what would happen to him if he took his goods away and left the women and children there to be murdered by the Indians.

Uncle Jim came home Tuesday, August twenty-sixth. He said Father was all right but that they had been separated. We watched anxiously every minute that it was light enough to see, until he came on Wednesday.

He told us some hair-raising stories of Indian cruelty, and of narrow escapes from death.

The defenders suffered for want of water. Uncle Jim said he found a pail of water and bran which had been fixed for the pigs. Though it had stood for several days and soured, he drank the water off and thought it the best drink he had ever had in his life.

We were glad to go home and to have Father with us again.

45

Orson and Clara, 1862

47

RUMORS AND ALARMS

It was decided that in those troublous times it would be wiser for us to live at Grandfather's.

As our chickens were still at the old place, Mother went over every afternoon to feed them and gather the eggs. She always took one of us children with her for company. Though I went many times, I remember only one day in particular. We crossed the race on a wagon bridge, walked a short distance to the creek, which we crossed on a footbridge, passed a large plum thicket, which at that time of the year was always surrounded with high weeds, and then went up a little hill to the house. After feeding the chickens and picking up the eggs, we started home. When we reached the foot of the hill, Mother stepped out of the road and parted the weeds so that she could see into the plum thicket. I asked her why she did that and she said she thought she would see if there was an Indian in there. I hadn't been thinking of Indians, but when she said that, I was so frightened, that I kept her between me and that plum thicket all the way home.

You will remember that this was during the Civil War. A company of soldiers was stationed at Le Sueur for a time. They were nearly all 48 Irish, and their company was Company K. They made a bad name for themselves by robbing hen-roosts. For years, Company K meant to me a lot of Irish chicken thieves.

In the early fall of 1862, there was a report that the Indians were again on the warpath. Grandmother, Aunt Mary Swan, her son Ora, Mother, and we five children went in a covered wagon, with a family by the name of McKee, to Shakopee, intending to go on to Indiana if the report was true. Mother carried over eight hundred dollars in gold and silver on her person, and Grandmother had more than a thousand. The Landlord of the hotel where we stayed in Shakopee would come into the parlor every evening, and say, “Now, children, we are going to have a light on the subject.” The “light” was the most wonderful hanging lamp with prisms around it. More wonderful to us, because we had never before seen any light but that of the tallow candle. I think we were in Shakopee about a week; then hearing that the report of an Indian outbreak was false, we went home.

Not long afterward we got a small glass kerosene lamp. We put a piece of red flannel in the bowl and thought it beautiful.

49

SCHOOL AND NEIGHBORS

A shack near the old mill had been repaired and was used for a schoolhouse.

With the exception of Mamie Drake, Charley and Willie Stewart, and our family, the children were all Germans from the woods. There were Caroline Gechler, quite a big girl, whose mother whipped her in school, before the teacher and all the children, because she had told a story; “Shorty” Wasman, who could never eat his meals until he had peeled enough potatoes for his father—they always boiled their potatoes in their jackets; the Beechers, Minto, Henry, Caroline and Joel; and perhaps others whose names I have forgotten.

Once Mamie Drake, Minnie, and I went to visit the Beecher girls. The children had to take turns asking a blessing at the table. It was Joel's turn and he didn't want to because we were there. He finally said it in German, after his father had whipped him.

Our teacher for two summers was Amy Sweet, from Ohio. She had very black hair and quite a perceptible moustache. She offered a prize for the one who would show the most improvement in penmanship and I won it, a copy book. Orson, 50 thinking he should have had it, scolded all the way home.

Spelling and pronunciation were always hard for me, but I was quick to catch the meaning, and could read with expression, so Miss Sweet let me read in the fourth reader, with the big boys and girls.

When we went to school, we walked on the race bank to the dam, and then followed the creek to the schoolhouse. It was so pretty in May and June—to this day I can see the birds

and squirrels, and smell the wild plum blossoms. We took our dinners, and at noon would often wander so far away along the creek or into the woods, that the sound of no ordinary school bell could reach us; so the teacher always borrowed a big dinner bell that Mother used to call the men in from the field when we lived on the farm.

Minnie keeps that bell under the edge of her bed now, for a burglar alarm.

About three quarters of a mile east of our house lived Mr. Randolph, affectionately called Uncle Jimmie, and his good wife. They were always helping people who were in trouble, caring for homeless children, and doing nice things for everybody. To go there we had to pass a deserted log cabin, and I can still feel the thrills of fear which ran up and down my back, as with side-long glances we hurried past that “haunted house.” Yes, it must have been haunted, for hadn't some one seen a black cat in the window? Ben and Mary Eune, German children, who had been prisoners of the Indians for a time, and whose father was killed by them, lived at Uncle Jimmie's for a few 51 weeks. We used to visit Mary occasionally, and she taught us to count to fifteen in Indian. Here it is: “Ene, tene, dether, feather, pip, sather, lather, coe, dever, dick, enedick, tenedick, detherdick, featherdick, bomphy.” I wonder whether the Indians ever heard it? Once there was a tall boy there, I have forgotten his name, who drew flags for us and colored them so that they looked like real flags. We wanted to use the colors, but of course he wouldn't let us.

Jim Wise, his wife and three daughters, Hattie, Anna and Floy, lived a half mile west of us on the road to Le Sueur. They took the New York Ledger, a weekly story paper. When the paper came, whoever got it first dropped her work, no matter what she was doing, locked herself in a room, and read it through. Then there was a scramble to see who should have it next. Small as I was, I wondered why one of them didn't read aloud to the others. I am still wondering. Hattie said once, “P-i-a-n-o is pronounced pieanna, because I like pie and so does Anna.” Mr. Wise always called Minnie “Curly” and offered to trade a pig for her.

A shiftless, good-for-nothing family named Hatton lived in the Cogswell house one summer. We children went to see them once, but were never allowed to go again. The whole family went barefoot; they called cover, kiver and kettle, kittle; they borrowed kettles to cook in, and things to cook, never returning anything. I don't know where they came from, or where they went, but the neighbors were all glad to see them go.

52

MONEY AND FASHIONS

There were no banks in that part of the country at that time, and many people kept their money in stocking legs. Ours was in a leather pouch which was hidden in a box of rags, and Grandfather kept his locked in a small drawer of their bureau. Though he lived until 1883, he never put his money in a bank, to my knowledge. He usually had it out at ten or twelve percent, possibly more, for I know that the rate of interest was high. I used to heat it said of a man in Mankato, “He don't know anything but three percent a month.”

When Grandfather had money paid in, he used to count it in the bedroom. Once we children were allowed to peep in and see the gold eagles and double eagles stacked on the window sill. He gave us each a dime and we didn't know what to do with it. A family council was held, and it was decided after deliberate and solemn debate that each of us should buy a little evergreen tree for the yard. Father hitched Tom Sayres and John C. Heenan, the matched bay colts, to the buggy and took us to Amasa Stewart's nursery, where we selected our trees. We took them home and proudly planted them. When we moved away 53 it was with a pang that we said good-bye to our evergreen trees.

Clara and Orson went to school in Le Sueur during the winter. Clara's crowd was made up of about a dozen girls fourteen or fifteen years old. One winter the milliner, having an eye for business, brought on a dozen fur caps and priced them at twelve dollars each. Clara wanted one. Mother said, “No.” Father said, “Let her have it if the other girls have them.” So she got it. It was the ugliest head covering ever devised, except perhaps the shaker.

A shaker, shaped somewhat like a sunbonnet, was made of straw, sometimes white, sometimes dark and white mixed, and sometimes all dark. It had a cape, strings, and a bank over the top, finished with a bow made of gingham, chambray or whatever kind of goods and of whatever color the wearer chose. We had them, of course, for everybody wore them. I usually wore mine hanging down my back, as I had no use for anything which obstructed my vision.

The most senseless fashion we ever had was wearing hoopskirts. There were neither pretty nor comfortable, but, as they were the style, of course we wouldn't be seen without them. We wore them several years, too, for styles didn't change then as often as they do now.

Mother got a Wheeler and Wilson sewing machine in 1863 or 1864. It was supposed to be a great help; but, as almost at once the women and girls began wearing ruffles on everything, the sewing took about as much time as it had before. We had to be stylish.

THE MAN WITH A POLE, AND OTHER STORIES

One morning in the summer of 1863 or 1864, the dogs began to growl and their hair stood straight up on their necks. We looked to find what the trouble was and saw a very strange-looking man coming down the hill. He carried a pole six or eight feet long and seemed to be talking to himself. Mother sent me upstairs to look out of the window on that side of the house, to see if there were others coming. Of course we thought of Indians, and I was afraid. I gave one glance out of the window and flew down stairs about three steps at a time, expecting every jump I made that an Indian would grab me by the hair. When the man drew near the house, we saw that he was not an Indian, but we didn't know what he was. Of course the dogs kept on growling, and the man said, “Dog bite me, dog bite me, dog bite me,” over and over. Then he said, “Water, water, water, water,” over and over. Mother went to a window, assured him that the dogs would not hurt him, and, handling him

a cup, told him he could get a drink from the race. Just then Orson came down the race bank ringing the big bell. (School had closed the day before and we 55

Alice and Minnie, 1862

57 had forgotten to bring it home.) When the man heard the noise he started in that direction. Then we *were* frightened and Mother called Orson to run, *run* the other way and to stop ringing the bell. As soon as the ringing ceased, the man came back towards the house, and Orson ran to the mill and told the men. They caught the man, took him in the wagon to Le Sueur, and turned him over to the authorities. The next day we heard that he was a perfectly harmless idiot belonging to a German family in the woods. He had escaped from the room in which he was always locked.

Maple sugar was made in the spring when the sap began to run. Our old friends, the Lewis Smiths from Ottawa, had a “sugar bush” east of us, and we had a standing invitation to visit them when they were ready to “sugar off.” I remember going one Sunday. Father could never leave the mill during the week. It was neither sleighing nor wagoning, but we went in the bobsled. Thee horses would wallow through a snowdrift and then drag through a mudhole. We very nearly upset several times, but finally reached the camp. It was such fun to help gather the sap and watch it boil until it was ready to be poured over snow to cool. When it was waxy we ate all we could and carried some home.

Mother kept a hired girl nearly all the time, for Grandmother was never able to help, and the sewing for nine, tailoring for two men, knitting, mending, candle, soap-, and butter-making was about as much as one little women could do. She usually had German girls, but once she had an 58 Irish girl from Tyrone township, which was settled almost wholly by Irish. That girl must have been getting ready to be married, for she stole sheets pillow cases, and towels. They had quite a time getting them back.

Mother was as good as a doctor in all ordinary cases, and much cheaper, for she never charged anything for her services. She was sent for very often when women and children were sick.

Willie was a cute little boy, but he certainly was a handful. When Mother thought he was old enough for pants, she made him some. He objected to them and soon disappeared. After while he came home without a stitch of clothing on, crying for his dress. He had left his clothes on the racebank half way to the dam. He often fell into the creek or the race and came home as wet as a drowned rat; and once he poked a stick into the bee hives and was stung almost to death.

When I was about ten, I learned to knit and make tatting. After that I always knitted my own wool stockings.

59

In the spring of 1865, Grandfather sold his part of the mill to Mr. Herrick and his sons Seth and Harvey; and as the water in the creek was getting low, the new firm decided to put in a steam engine and add a sawmill. The engine was installed, the sawmill machinery was in place, a pile of logs was ready for sawing, and everybody in the neighborhood was on hand to see the mill start. A log was put on the carriage and the slab sawed off. The first board caught on the saw and was thrown off, describing an are through the air for ten or fifteen feet. It hit Father in the left leg and threw him clear off the ground. He fell on a timber, dislocating his shoulder and breaking his collar bone. When the board struck his leg it broke both bones between the knee and ankle. The leg was not set right, and though he lay for three months with it in a stretcher, it was always crooked and troubled him the rest of his life.

60

GRANDFATHER BUYS A NEW MILL-SITE

The Winnebago Indian Reservation was in Blue Earth County, south of Mankato. After the Sioux Massacre of 1862, the white people never felt safe with the Indians so near them, although that tribe had always been friendly. Pressure was brought to bear on the Government, with the result that the Indians were removed in the spring of 1865 and the land they had occupied was thrown open to settlers.

Grandfather bought one hundred and sixty acres of land in the reservation, situated on both sides of the Blue Earth river and including a mill-site. He decided to build a mill there, and offered Father a chance to go in as partner with him and Uncle Jim Swan. Father, being dissatisfied with the Herricks, who were very disagreeable men, sold to a Mr. Paul from St. Peter and made arrangements to move as soon as he was well enough.

Grandfather built his house at Rapidan—that was the name of the township, and the Mill was called Rapidan Mills—and when they were moving in about the first of September, Grandmother sent word for me to go with the next load. Of course I was terribly excited. Mother got me ready and we started very early one morning, for 61

Willie, 1862.

63 it was thirty-six miles, and the horses had to walk all the way because of their heavy load. We went south through Ottawa, St. Peter, Kasota, Mankato and South Bend. When we came to Pigeon Hill, I thought we would never get to the top, it was so high. Then we went through Welsh Lane, passed Rush Lake—the first lake I had ever seen, went on to the Piper schoolhouse, turned east, and at the end of a mile and a quarter more came to Grandfather's house. It was after dark.

The last sounds I heard that night were the water in the river murmuring, murmuring over the stones, and a whippoorwill calling. Those were the last sounds I heard at night during a part of every summer, until 1892. As Father, Mother and Minnie moved to California that year, we no longer went to Rapidan.

When I looked out in the morning, I thought nothing could be more beautiful; and I still think that, in its natural state, it was one of the loveliest places in the world.

The rest of the family came about the middle of October. I was very glad to see them, for I was getting homesick. Willie jumped out of the buggy and said, “Allie, Allie, I can fistle”; then he proceeded to show me that he could.

We moved into our own house November third, and that night Sister Ida was born. Our cow was dry, and the baby nearly starved. Two of the neighbors had plenty of milk, but they couldn't spare any as they were shipping butter. I don't know what they did feed her, but Grandfather's cow began giving milk in January, and then she had plenty.

64

THE PIPER SCHOOLHOUSE

[Soon after getting settled in our own house, Clara, Orson, Minnie, and I started to school in the Piper schoolhouse, a mile and a quarter from home. It was a log building about twenty by thirty feet, with a door and four windows. The furniture consisted of a small blackboard, two benches built against the walls the entire length of the room, and a long desk in front of each bench, with another bench fastened to the front of that. The desks and front benches were enough shorter to allow room at the ends for the children to slip in and out. A big box stove occupied the middle of the room during the winter. Our wraps were hung on nails at our backs, and a pail of water and a dipper were on the end of one of the back benches next to the door. The shelf in the girl's desk was several inches too short, and often the books would fall to the floor. I have no doubt that sometimes they were pushed out purposely.]

I think I could call the roll of that first morning and not miss half a dozen names out of the forty.

There were a number of Irish, a few Germans, and a few Welsh, besides the Americans.

[The teacher, Erastus Wilson, familiarly called 65 “Rat” by everybody, was afraid to punish the big boys and girls, but would vent his wrath on the little fellows, if they dared even to whisper. One day he swung Jim Lettuce around by the collar and knocked the stove over. Jim was an Irish boy who seemed to be the goat, always suffering for the sins of others.

Forty of us, of all ages and degrees of intelligence, and *one* teacher! We didn't learn much but we had a good time.] We built snow forts, dug tunnels through the snow, played pom pom pull away, and prisoner's base. Sometimes we had *real* fights.

One very stormy day, Fillmore Mills had been out of school, but came with the bobsled to take everybody home who went his way. The roll was called just before school closed. Fillmore was looking in through a broken window and when his name was called said “present.” Poor old “Rat” Wilson didn't know that he had been absent all day.

[Generally in the summer most of the pupils were the small and middle sized children, but one summer one big boy went, Fred Dustin, a bully of whom we were all afraid. Our teacher required us to speak pieces on Friday afternoons. When Fred refused, the teacher told him that if he wasn't prepared the next Friday she would punish him. The day came, the rest of us spoke our pieces, and Fred was called. He got up with his hat in his hand. The teacher turned white, and we sat with bated breath, waiting for something to happen. But instead of leaving the room, he marched up to the 66 front, held out his hat, and delivered this classic: “Here's my old hat, but what of that? “Twas once new and shining, But now the lice, the ‘tarnal lice, Have et out all the lining.”

He had spoken his piece, and the teacher couldn't say a word. She never insisted upon his speaking another.]

Once some of us girls went to wade in Loon Lake, which was half or three quarters of a mile from the schoolhouse. When we got out of the water our feet and legs were covered

with blood suckers, and Minnie found one on the bottom of her foot after we reached the schoolhouse. As we had only an hour's nooning, of course we were an hour or more late. I don't remember what our punishment was, but at the time we thought it quite severe.

We wore shakers in the summer. Sometimes, when the wind blew them out, we climbed through the window and brought them back.

Loretta Young was our teacher one summer and one winter. She was very bright and a good teacher, but after a few years she lost her mind. The boys used to wonder which one of us drove her crazy.

Once, during the second winter. I went home with Ida Long to stay all night. She was a nice girl, but I didn't care for her family. Their shiftlessness, to me, was almost a sin. Her father, a tall, thin, slow-moving man, was always saying, “I desire a warmer climate,” but he hadn't ambition enough to move. Her brother Albert liked me; therefore I hated him. A blizzard came up 67 during the night, and in the morning we found about an inch of snow on the bed. In their usual way, they were late getting up. For breakfast they had pancakes and molasses. The molasses barrel was in the shed, and the old saying, “As slow as molasses in January,” was exemplified that morning. After it was already school time we had to wait for that molasses to run.

Finally we started, Mr. Long taking us in the sled. The lanes were drifted full of snow, so that we had to drive through the fields. It was after ten o'clock when we reached the schoolhouse, and I was ashamed to go in. I had never been late to school in my life, and thought I was disgraced forever.

68

THE BLUE EARTH RIVER

The Blue Earth river was very rapid and the whole bed was filled with boulders, excepting where there were eddies; there the bottom was sandy and sandbars ran back to the bluffs.

Clams of all sizes and crayfish lived in the mud along the margins, and in the deep water we sometimes saw soft-shelled turtles over two feet across. There was an island in the river, and the mill dam was built from the island to one bank only. The mill, which was about an eighth of a mile below the dam, was much larger than the mills on Le Sueur Creek and had turbine wheels.

The men dressed the grinding stones by hand—we called it “picking the burrs.” Sometimes they got pieces of steel in their eyes. That was very serious, with the nearest doctor four or five miles away.

A trap was built at the tail gate; and if the gate was left open at night during the spawning season, the trap would be full of fish in the morning. I have seen pickerel three or four feet long, catfish weighing thirty or forty pounds, and gar with bills as long as their bodies. There were also black bass, bullheads, redhorse, suckers, pike and other kinds. The men would take them to Mankato by the wagon load and sell them.

There was no bridge until 1879 and the men had to haul the flour to Mankato by the way of Welsh Lane. In rainy weather that lane was just one continuous mire from end to end and it was several miles long. Sometimes the mud was hub deep.

During the summer when the water was low, teams forded the river; and when it was high a skiff was used for ferrying people and grists across. When the water was very high, it took strong arms to row the boat across, and even then the current carried it far down the stream.

The cows used to swim across, thinking, I suppose, that the pasture was better on the other side. When milking time came, Father would say to the grizzled shepherd dog, “Go after them, Dan.” He would swim across, go around the cows, drive them to the river's

brink, then nip their heels and make them swim back. He was a house dog and used to sleep behind the stove all day when we were in school. At four o'clock he would ask to be let out, and regularly met us half way to the schoolhouse. Poor old Dan! As he grew old he had rheumatism and would cry if he were touched. During a mad-dog scare, thinking he had been bitten, they had him shot.

The mill pond had a sandy bottom and made a fine swimming hole in summer. In the winter we skated on it, if it froze sufficiently before snow came. We often skated on rubber ice so clear that we could see very little pebble on the bottom of the river.

If the winter was very cold the ice would freeze three or four feet thick, and when it broke up and 72 went out in the spring it was a sight never to be forgotten. If it formed a jam on any obstruction, it was almost certain to sweep everything with it. As our mill dam was on but one side of the island, and across the smaller channel, it never went out, but Mr. Dustin, who had a mill on the Wattonwan river a few miles above us, lost his nearly every spring. One day one of the little boys, Ora Swan, I think, came running in, shouting, “Old Dustin's broke loose.” I can't tell you of the awesomeness of the scene—the water so high that it came almost to the mill floor, the cakes of ice, many of them as large as a large room, all grinding together, shoving this way and that, and standing on edge, with wreckage and sometimes large uprooted trees being ground to pieces between them.

73

OUR HOMES

Our houses faced the river and the high bluffs beyond. There was a winding path down a steep hill from our house and Grandfather's, and a wagon road also to the mill, between our house and Uncle Jim's. That road was the grandest place for coasting during the winter. The boys used to make sleds long enough for three or four people.

In our yard, southwest of the house, was a wild plum ticket. There was such a thicket near every house we lived in during the early days. The plums were of different kinds, some

dark red, almost purple, some a lighter red, and others yellow. Some of them were as large as small hen's eggs and perfectly delicious. In later years they had all disappeared. Evidently they didn't like civilization.

Back of our house was a grove of poplar trees, which we called popples. We used to put boxes and tin cans in the trees and against the house for nesting places for the wrens, and boxes for the purple martins. The martins were Mormons.

The yards were all fenced. We had three gates, one south of the house opening into the wagon road, and two, a front and a back, opening into 74 the private road leading to Grandfather's house. Near the front gate was a magnificent white oak tree, so large that it took three of the smaller children to reach around it. Father often said he wouldn't take a hundred dollars for it. The Scandinavian who bought the house cut that tree down for firewood.

Our house was a “Wayside Inn” for Methodist preachers. They would come with their families and stay several days. One of them, John Powell, was a character equal to any of Dickens's. He was a pioneer circuit rider, uneducated but intelligent and witty. One of his prayers was, “God bless all us men who chop cordwood and cut hoop poles, and all us women who fry pancakes and bake biscuits.” Once when he tried to raise some money at Mapleton for the Foreign Missionary cause, he got a dollar and fifteen cents. Soon after that, preaching at the Just schoolhouse, he told his audience of his effort and the result. In conclusion he said: “The Angel Gabriel will fly through heaven and flap his wings and say, ‘Mapleton gave a dollar and fifteen cents for the Missionary cause.’ Brother Mendenhall, pass around the hat.” When he heard that the big white oak tree had been cut down, he said: “Laws a mercy! The man who cuts down a shade tree should never be allowed to go to heaven; the first thing he would do when he got there would be to hack down the tree of life.” He used to tell of going to see his parishioners when it was very cold, and taking home buttermilk tied up in a rag.

In the woods north of our house grew quantities of wild flowers, hepatica, Dutchman's breeches, a 75 small pink orchid, nodding trillium, bellwort—we called that the yellow lily—bloodroot and large yellow lady slippers. Very large pink lady slippers grew in the edge of the woods across the river, and small pink and small yellow ones in swampy places not far away.

We went to the woods very often, especially in the spring, and came home laden with flowers and wood tickets.

SOME OF OUR DUTIES

Minnie and I loved to go to Grandmother's, winter evenings. We would hurry through the supper dishes slip softly out the back door and just fly. We would no sooner get there than Mother would call us back to sew carpet rags. We knew she would, but the next night we would go again, hoping we could stay a few minutes.

It was necessary for the carpet rags to be sewed during the winter, for the new carpets were woven in the spring and put down at the time of the housecleaning. We had rag carpets all over the house excepting in the kitchen and pantry. We always put a thick layer of clean straw underneath to keep them clean and make then wear longer.

We made butter in a dash churn. If the cream was a little too cold, we would churn, and churn, and churn until we thought our arms would drop off. Then in desperation we would put in a little hot water. If the water was too hot, or if we put in too much, the butter would be a soft white mess scarcely fit to eat.

We always kept hogs, and when the weather grew cold, along about Thanksgiving, the men would butcher. We tried out the lard, made sausage 77 and head cheese, and smoked the hams and shoulders. We made pickled meat instead of bacon, of the sides.

We had a machine which we called the little black pig, in which we ground our sausage meat. A neighbor would borrow that and a big iron kettle in which we rendered the lard; after using them he would loan them to some one else, and that one to another and so on, until they would be miles from home. When we wanted to use them, it would often take a day to locate and bring them back.

Father kept a good many swarms of bees, so that we always had plenty of honey for our own use, and some to sell. Sometimes we strained the honey—an extractor had never been thought of—and made beeswax of the comb. When Grandfather strained his honey —he never would let any one else do it—he made the most awful mess. Everything was sticky from the garret to the cellar.

We made our own candles, and I have drawn many dozens from the moulds.

During the winter we put our hardwood ashes into a hopper and in the spring would carry water and pour it on the ashes to make lye. When it was strong enough to bear up an egg, we put cracklings and other grease into it and cooked them together to make soft soap.

For a number of years we carried water from a spring on the hillside north of Grandfather's, for cooking and drinking purposes, though we had a 78 cistern and rain barrels for soft water. Sometimes the cistern would go dry during the winter and then we had to melt snow. That was fun for us children but hard work for the others.

VARIOUS THINGS OF INTEREST

One year the breweries were offering a good price for hops, so C. P. Cooke, one of our neighbors, raised some. He offered board and fifteen or twenty cents a box—I forget which —for picking. I think a box held five bushels. All the girls for miles around responded to the call, hoping to make some money. We knew the hops were to be used for making beer,

so we put in all the bugs, worms and grasshoppers we could catch. We didn't make much money, but we had a lot of fun.

One summer we had an almost total eclipse of the sun. We watched through a smoked glass the shadow of the moon creep across the face of the sun, and then pass off. It was weird and gave us a very strange feeling. The chickens cackled loudly, looked up at the sun, and finally went to roost. The cows bawled and the horses neighed. I'll never forget how foolish the chickens looked when in a short time the sun was shining as usual.

In 1869 the school district was divided, and a new building put up just across the meadow from our house. Now we had desks just large enough for two, better equipment, and fewer children. We should have learned a great deal more and I 80 suppose we did in some ways, but at their very best the schools were poor.

I think I was nearly grown before we had silver forks, and then we used them only when we had company. For every day we used steel knives and forks and scoured them with brick dust after every meal.

Teacups with handles became the fashion. Mother refused to buy them for several years, because she knew the handles would be broken off—and they were.

81

Ida, 1868

83

PLAGUES

One Fourth of July, while we were at a picnic at Good Thunder—a town named for a Winnebago chief—we noticed that it was growing dark, though there were no clouds. We looked up and someone exclaimed, “The grasshoppers are coming.” The air was so full of them that it looked like a partial eclipse of the sun. Their wings shone like silver. Soon they began to settle on the ground, and in a few minutes we couldn't move without stepping on

them. They ate hoe handles, rake handles, clothing that was left out, and in fact everything but metal. After eating every green thing there was, they did their eggs; the next spring millions hatched out and began eating at once.

The state, county, and township all offered bounties, and people caught them by the bushel with nets and in other ways, some earning large sums of money. They were brought to the mill, which was one of the receiving stations, in gunny sacks, weighed, scalded, and buried.

We also had a plague of buffalo gnats one spring, and animals and even people died from the bites.

The summer before Ida was a year old, we had 84 a terrible scourge of fuzzy white caterpillars. There were so many that we couldn't keep them out of the house. Ida saw one on the floor, picked it up, and, baby fashion, put it in her mouth. She was so badly poisoned that we were afraid she would die.

85

THE OCCULT

A family named Jewett lived near the river just on the edge of the Winnebago reservation. They were relatives of the Tyler family, who were friends of ours. In the spring of 1865, Charley Tyler was working for Mr. Jewett. His sister Eva, a girl of sixteen, went over there one Saturday night to stay until Monday. Sunday morning she told the family they must go away, as something terrible was going to happen—she didn't know what. They laughed at her, but she cried and insisted that they go home with her. Finally Charley took her home. She begged him to stay until Monday morning, but he, thinking it was a foolish notion, went back. That night some half-breed Winnebago Indians, knowing that Mr. Jewett had a large sum of money in the house, killed the whole family excepting a year-old boy, and they thought they had killed him.

That happened the spring before we went to Rapidan, so we never saw Charley; but his three brothers and four sisters went to school with us in the Piper schoolhouse.

Several years later, after Eva was married, she had a similar experience.

May, her brother Burton's wife, was sick. One 86 night, when her husband went home from work, Eva had her wraps on and was watching for him. She ran out and said, “Jake, don't put the team up; I have to go right back to Burton's”

He was cold, tired, and hungry, and wanted her to wait until after supper, but she was so insistent that he drove back. They found May sitting up in bed and feeling pretty well, but in about ten minutes she fell over dead.

When Jake told Father about it, he said, “After this, when Eva says go, I go.”

87

CONCLUSION

The years came and went. We worked, and played, and went to school, had our little childish quarrels and our reconciliations. We always went to a picnic the Fourth of July and possibly to one or two others during the summer. In the winter we went occasionally to singing school, spelling school, a party, or a sleigh ride.

Mother, being musical, and never having had advantages herself, was ambitious for us to learn something about music, so they bought a melodeon and a few years later a cabinet organ. Though we took music lessons, we accomplished very little, because we were not musical and didn't like to practice. We did learn enough, however, to play church music, and that pleased Mother.

Every fall we went to the Garden City Fair, where we saw our friends from all around the country, for no one would stay away unless he were sick. We saw the bed quilts and all

the fancy work in Floral Hall, and everything else of interest, and grew very much excited over the horse races.

Once we went to a circus and saw that fat woman, the living skeleton, the educated pig and the big 88 snakes, all of which made a lasting impression upon our minds.

There were no railroads, no automobiles, telephones, electric lights, flying machines or moving picture shows; but “Little we asked, our wants were few,” so we were contented and happy.

“That was when meadow, grove and stream, The earth and every common sight To me did seem Apparelled in celestial light.” —*Wordsworth.*

“The past is myself, my own history; the seed of my present disposition. It is not in vain that I return to the nothings of my childhood, for every one of them has left some stamp upon me or put some fetter on boasted free will. In my past is my present fate and in the past also is my real life.” — *Robert Louis Stevenson.*